

MEDIA RELEASE

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SPEAK AFRICA CAMPAIGN FOR NO VIOLENCE AGAINST CHILDREN AND YOUTH LAUNCHED

***38 million African children witness violence in their homes
Rising food prices and inflation increase vulnerability of children***

ADDIS ABABA, 17 June 2008 - The Speak Africa Campaign for No Violence Against Children and Youth was launched by the African Union, UNICEF, NGO partners in the African Movement for Children and the Speak Africa Youth Communication Initiative as part of Day of the African Child celebrations in Addis Ababa, seat of the African Union Commission.

According to the 2007 UN Secretary General's Study on Violence Against Children, the family setting, which should hold the greatest potential for protecting children, is one of the most common sites of violence with approximately 38 million children in Sub-Saharan Africa frequently witnessing violence in their homes.

Rising food prices and inflation are contributing to increased vulnerability and violence against children and youth across the African continent.

"Irrespective of the numbers of children affected, children are now at the forefront as the primary victims of the growing world food crisis and shortages in Africa," said Dr. Assefa Bequele, Executive Director of the Africa Child Policy Forum.

"Families are denied the capacity to take care of their children, exposing their children to the hazards of child labor, child prostitution, child trafficking, and child slavery. The question is not just about food, it is about the rights and well-being of children."

The Speak Africa Campaign for No Violence Against Children and Youth calls for the ratification of the African Charter for the Rights and Welfare of Children and the African Youth Charters as a minimum demonstration of sincere commitment to the protection and development of children.

Central African Republic, Congo, Djibouti, Democratic Republic of Congo, Gabon, Guinea-Bissau, Liberia, Somalia, Sudan, Swaziland, Tunisia and Zambia have yet to ratify the African Charter for the Rights and Welfare of Children, while only four countries have ratified the African Youth Charter.

"African countries should prioritize ratification of the Charters," said Erastus Mwencha, Deputy Chairperson of the African Union. "These are important legal instrument that need to be applied in every member state."

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The Charters provide frameworks for protecting children against extreme forms of violence, including sexual exploitation and trafficking, female genital cutting, the worst forms of child labour, armed conflict and routine exposure to physical, sexual and psychological violence in their homes, schools, care and justice institutions, the places they work and their communities.

In several African countries, including Ethiopia, Egypt, Guinea, Mauritania and Chad, the majority of girls are still subject to the physically and psychologically damaging practice of female genital cutting. Girls across the continent are also victims of incest, rape, child trafficking and forced prostitution, while boys are often the subjects of violent punishment, peer violence, detainment in juvenile justice systems. Sodomy and engagement of boys as child soldiers are also issues of concern.

“As we celebrate the Day of the African Child we recall the sacrifice that the children and youth of Soweto made in 1976 when they were gunned down as they took to the streets to demand their right to be taught in their own language,” said Bjorn Ljungqvist, UNICEF Representative to Ethiopia and Special Representative to the African Union.

This year’s Day of the African Child theme is Right to Participation: Children are to be Heard and Seen

“Children and youth made unconditional demands for their rights, and their sacrifice triggered a new phase in the struggle against Apartheid. This spirit of participation will be critical for the success of the No Violence Against Children and Youth Campaign.”

The No Violence Campaign which is being implemented as part of the Year of the African Youth will climax on the Day of the African Youth, 1 November 2008, and culminate on the 60th anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights in December 2008.

The campaign is being conducted in collaboration with Speak Africa, the pan African children and youth communication initiative endorsed by the African Union, United Nations and NGO partners to promote the participation of young people in the development of the African Continent.

“Speak Africa harnesses the power of technology and media to empower young people to express themselves and act,” said Linda Yohannes, member of the Speak Africa media team in Ethiopia. “Blog on at www.speakafrica.org and join the movement to end violence against children and youth in Africa.”

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Photographs of the launch in Addis Ababa available upon request
Visit the Speak Africa website at www.speakafrica.org